

JOHNNY HODGES
TRIPLE PLAY





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|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. TAKE 'EM OFF, TAKE 'EM OFF—PART 1 | 3:39 |
| 2. TAKE 'EM OFF, TAKE 'EM OFF—PART 2 | 2:56 |
| 3. THE NEARNESS OF YOU | 3:46 |
| 4. MONKEY ON A LIMB | 3:53 |
| 5. A TINY BIT OF BLUES | 4:53 |
| 6. FOR JAMMERS ONLY (aka WILD ONIONS) | 3:02 |
| 7. ON THE WAY UP | 2:52 |
| 8. BIG BOY BLUES | 3:20 |
| 9. THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU | 2:49 |
| 10. FUR PIECE | 6:22 |
| 11. SIR JOHN | 3:19 |
| 12. FIGURINE | 2:39 |
| 13. C-JAM BLUES | 4:21 |



RCA VICTOR

Johnny Hodges, leader and alto sax

Executive Producer: Steve Backer

Reissue Produced by John Snyder

Reissue Engineer: Tom MacCluskey

Original Sessions Produced by Brad McCuen

*Original stereo recording by Don Miller**Recorded in RCA Victor's Studio A1, January 9 and 10, 1967*

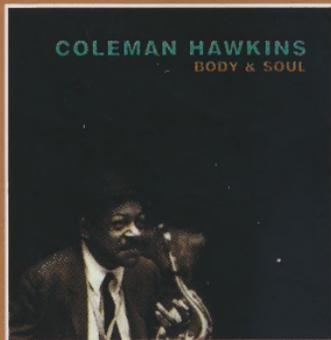
Series Producer: Steve Gates

Digitally remastered
using 20-Bit Super MappingTotal
Playing
Time: 50:19
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More Jazz Giants on RCA Victor:



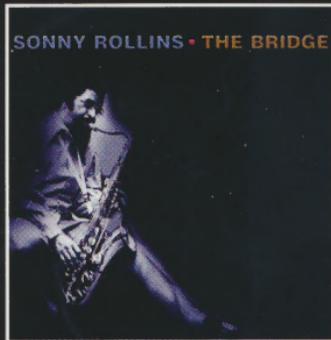
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RCA VICTOR



RCA VICTOR

J **1 TAKE 'EM OFF, TAKE 'EM OFF—PART 1** (Johnny Hodges) 3:39 **2 TAKE 'EM OFF, TAKE 'EM OFF—PART 2** (Johnny Hodges) 2:56 **3 THE NEARNESS OF YOU** (Ned Washington—Hoagy Carmichael) 3:46 **4 MONKEY ON A LIMB** (Johnny Hodges) 3:53 **5 A TINY BIT OF BLUES** (Johnny Hodges) 4:53 **JOHNNY HODGES**, leader and alto sax; **RAY NANCE**, cornet; **BUSTER COOPER**, trombone; **PAUL GONSALVES**, tenor sax; **HANK JONES**, piano; **JIMMY JONES**, 2nd piano, arranger; **TINY GRIMES**, guitar; **MILT HINTON**, bass; **GUS JOHNSON**, drums; **6 FOR JAMMERS ONLY** (aka WILD ONIONS) (Claude Bolling; arr.: Johnny Hodges) 3:02 **7 ON THE WAY UP** (Johnny Hodges) 2:52 **JOHNNY HODGES**, leader and alto sax; **CAT ANDERSON**, trumpet; **LAWRENCE BROWN**, trombone **JIMMY HAMILTON**, tenor sax; **JIMMY JONES**, piano; **BILL BERRY**, vibes; **LES SPANN**, guitar; **AARON BELL**, bass; **RUFUS JONES**, drums; **8 BIG BOY BLUES** (Johnny Hodges) 3:20 **JOHNNY HODGES**, leader and alto sax; **ROY ELDRIDGE**, trumpet; **BENNY POWELL**, trombone; **HARRY CARNEY**, baritone sax; **NAT PIERCE**, piano; **JIMMY JONES**, 2nd piano; **BILLY BUTLER**, guitar; **JOE BENJAMIN**, bass; **OLIVER JACKSON**, drums; **9 THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU** (Ray Noble) (per-

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sonnel as ON THE WAY UP) 2:49 **10 FUR PIECE** (Johnny Hodges) (personnel as BIG BOY BLUES) 6:22 **11 SIR JOHN** (Johnny Hodges) 3:19 **12 FIGURINE** (Johnny Hodges) (personnel as ON THE WAY UP) 2:39 **13 C-JAM BLUES** (Johnny Hodges) (personnel as BIG BOY BLUES)

Executive Producer: Steve Backer
Reissue Produced by John Snyder
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Original Sessions Produced by Brad McCuen
Original stereo recording by Don Miller
Recorded in RCA Victor's Studio A1,
January 9 and 10, 1967
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Series Producer: Steve Gates

Art Direction: Scott Johnson/J.J. Stelmach
Photography: Chuck Stewart

Duke Ellington:
"Johnny Hodges!
Johnny Hodges!!
Johnny Hodges!!!"

Johnny Hodges graced Duke Ellington's orchestra for nearly 40 years, and that was how Duke used to present Hodges to his audience after his solo features. Each "Johnny Hodges" would be phrased differently—just as it would have been if Hodges had played it—and each expressed the love, admiration and warmth Ellington had for his great solo star. When Hodges took his only sabbatical from the orchestra in the early '50s, the band became lackluster. When Hodges rejoined Duke in 1956, Ellington's orchestra took a new lease on life and became once again the premiere orchestra in American jazz music. Hodges died in 1970—he was still with Ellington—and when Duke heard of it he summed up his appreciation by saying, "My band will never sound the same again"

Johnny Hodges:
"I was all set to be a mastermind crook
—until I came under the spell of music"

Hodges' inspiration was Sidney Bechet, the great New Orleans master who had toured Europe as a professional before Louis Armstrong left New Orleans to go to Chicago. Bechet was undoubtedly the first major stylist of jazz.

Hodges first met Bechet in Boston where he used to cut school to hear him play. Bechet's magic so enchanted Hodges that he told his mother if she didn't get him a saxophone he might be tempted to steal one—hence his tongue-in-cheek quote above. She relented, and from then on Hodges was a musician, and he developed one of the most unique and persuasive styles in music. Hodges claimed he never had a formal music lesson in his life, but when Bechet was in Boston, Hodges took his soprano sax around to the theater and asked Bechet to show him a thing or two. Hodges later moved to New York where he was actually to play with Bechet at Bechet's club. Years later, in an interview with Henry Whiston, he said, "Bechet was tops in my book... He schooled me a whole lot and I'll say



that if it hadn't been for him, I'd probably just be playing music for a hobby." Hodges also played with Lloyd Scott and Chick Webb before joining Duke in 1928.

Regrettably there are no recordings to document Hodges' progress during the 1920s. Coleman Hawkins is usually given the credit for making the saxophone into a viable voice, but Hodges with his great command of the blues and his Bechet influence (Bechet came from the New Orleans "Western Style, which was more fluid than the somewhat stilted New York "Eastern Style") deserves credit also. When he first recorded with Ellington it was as though he emerged fully developed—much as Lester Young did when he was first recorded.

John Coltrane: "I wish I could play with the confidence that Hodges does."

Hodges' playing was instantly identifiable with his first note or two, and in today's age that is still a remarkable achievement. He seemed to know exactly where to place each note to obtain maximum swing. He wasn't interested in playing a lot of notes, but he made every one count. He understood that when something beautiful is being created, it makes sense to leave some spaces—so that his listeners can savor and linger over each delicacy. Just as the act of committing music to paper de-humanizes it, so Hodges when he played was able to put back the feeling—the humanity, if you will—that the written notes omit, and in a

sense that was a facility shared with very few other musicians. Hodges preferred slow and mid-tempo pieces (he was never totally convincing at up-tempo), and of course his playing was always suffused with the blues spirit—that very core that makes jazz music what it is.

Charlie Parker: "Johnny 'Lily Pons' Hodges... (I call him that 'cause he can sing with the horn.)"

Lily Pons was the great Metropolitan Opera star of the 1930s possessed of a beautiful voice. Parker's quote could not have been more apt. In the 1930s Hodges developed a ballad style that was without peer. Smooth, creamy; he has been accused of bringing his music almost to the verge



of mawkish sentimentality but always in his playing there is the blues. The paradox of Hodges was that in performance with Ellington he played with what looked like a couldn't-care-less attitude, yet his physical stance was totally belied by the stream of undiluted passion emanating from that saxophone. He had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of melodic ideas, he was always in total control of his music, and he always sounded so beautiful... and convincing. His sound was so compelling that it is reliably reported that more than one lady, at an Ellington concert, totally lost her composure at the sounds coming from that horn. Hodges is one of the two greatest alto saxophone players in jazz—the other being Charlie Parker—and although he did not leave a stylistic legacy among players of the next generation, the one influence he did leave was on John Coltrane (when Coltrane played in Hodges' band for a few months). "I really enjoyed that job," said Coltrane. "Nothing was superficial. It all had meaning and it all swung." Coltrane spent the rest of his life exploring the parameters of love—doubtless a legacy from Hodges.

Johnny Hodges: "I used to have a good time in those jam sessions."

Hodges was talking about the '50s, when he had his small group and on his off-nights would go down to the Village to jam with whoever might be playing. Fortunately during his career he always made records with small groups.

Some of the very best are the two RCA sessions of 1940–41, and that small-group tradition was continued when Ellington signed with RCA again. The music in this album was recorded in January 1967 at three separate sessions (on two consecutive days)—each session containing a different group of musicians. It contained three titles never previously released and has been remastered digitally for state-of-the-art sound. As with most Hodges small group records there are plenty of chances or the men to solo. *Take 'em Off, Take 'em Off—Parts 1 & 2* is a gospel-flavored blues presented here consecutively. The first part features Tiny Grimes, Buster Cooper and Hodges, while the second has a superbly declamatory Ray Nance and Paul Gonsalves. *The Nearness of You* is a highly expressive feature for Cooper's trombone. *Monkey on a Limb*—the first of the new pieces—is an "I Got Rhythm" variation with some nice



Hank Jones piano before Cooper, Gonsalves, Nance and Hodges solo. *A Tiny Bit of Blues* has Tiny Grimes and Hodges only—the other horns laying out. Clearly Grimes and Hodges were soul-mates, and it is a pity they did not record more frequently together. *For Jammers Only* (aka *Wild Onions*—a Claude Bolling tune) gives us the opportunity to hear Les Spann on guitar as well as Cat Anderson soloing both with Harmon mute and open. Jimmy Hamilton's clarinet opens the piece, and solos are also heard from Lawrence Brown and Johnny Hodges. Another new title is *Big Boy Blues* with Hodges taking two before two from Roy Eldridge. Roy plays with plunger mute—one of the few instances on record known to us. Harry Carney is next and then Hodges and the band put it away.

The Very Thought of You is the first of three Hodges features and demonstrates beautifully the sound and attack he perfected over the years. *Sir John* presents the blues side of Hodges (accompanied only by rhythm section), and it is interesting to compare these two sides of Hodges. *Fur Piece* has more of Roy Eldridge's pensive trumpet, two superb Harry Carney choruses, Billy Butler (the third guitarist on these sessions), Benny Powell and Hodges before Roy and the band close it. *Figurine*—the third new piece—is a delicate Hodges ballad. When Hodges was growing up in Boston he remembered the saxophone displays in the music stores. "My, they were so pretty. They had them in all colors those days, and they were so shiny." Perhaps *Figurine* is a remembrance of those sights. *C-Jam Blues*, which clos-

es the album, has been a long-time jamming favorite, and this version has Powell on trombone with Butler, Carney, Eldridge and Hodges.

This album demonstrates all aspects of Johnny Hodges' total artistry. One can only join with Duke Ellington and say, "Johnny Hodges! Johnny Hodges!! Johnny Hodges!!!"

—JOHN CLEMENT



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JOHNNY HODGES

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